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EUR/NCE FOR YEAGER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/23/2017

TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL SI

SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER RUPEL DENIES GOVERNMENT
INTERFERENCE WITH PRESS

REF: LJUBLJANA 722

Classified By: CDA Maryruth Coleman FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Foreign Minister Rupel requested a meeting with Charge November 22 to discuss charges by many journalists that the Jansa government is exerting indirect pressure on the media and restricting press freedom in Slovenia. Rupel fully dismissed the allegations, pointing to the broadly critical tone of articles about the government as evidence that the GOS does not manipulate the press. He argued that the journalists' complaints of government meddling were politically motivated, and that in Slovenia, unlike in other countries, "there is no media support for the Government."

¶2. (C) CDA asked why the press was so negative. Rupel responded that in post-independence Slovenia there had been no lustration or "showdown" between ex-Communists and others who had struggled for the establishment of an independent, democratic Slovenia. He claimed that the left-oriented elite had "an expectation of the right to rule" the country and that the media largely concurred. Rupel asserted that the media is hostile to the right of center government and looks for ways to criticize it. During the conversation, however, the FM did admit that "some people in the Government" -- not himself or the Prime Minister -- had made an effort to select a friendly editor of leading daily "Delo" and had succeeded in installing a general manager and editor-in-chief through two companies on the supervisory board - but that this gambit failed after a relatively short time.

¶3. (C) The FM stated that he had been informed that the U.S. Embassy had been "asking all around" about the press freedom issue and said he was concerned that the U.S. would doubt his or the PM's democratic credentials. CDA answered that the "Petition against Censorship" signed by 570 journalists (reportedly about a quarter of professionally active journalists in Slovenia) was unprecedented and that we had heard similar allegations from our press contacts. CDA pointed out that we have concerns and that we are trying to understand better what is going on. While we had heard many differing assessments of the allegations of government pressure, specific accusations of interference remained unexplained. CDA mentioned that we would address this issue in our human rights report, and that we would do everything we could to be accurate and fair.

¶4. (C) Rupel stated that PM Jansa had made important points about state shares in companies that own media outlets in his address to the Parliament on November 19 (reftel). He suggested that the Ministry might translate the text and send to all diplomatic missions in town.

¶5. (C) COMMENT - FM Rupel presented the expected government

line and reiterated points made by the GOS in its October 12 "statement on media freedom in Slovenia." His admission about some in the government attempting to place a friendly editor at a major newspaper was interesting. Our discussions with a wide swathe of contacts show there is sense of some pressure, but the debate after PM Jansa's November 19 presentation to Parliament also indicates that press freedom is considerable in Slovenia.

COLEMAN